

Robert Hicks — “Fellmonger”

L.R. “MONTY” HEALY
MONTY15@MSN.COM

Robert Hicks was a “fellmonger” (O.K., I had to look it up too), which is a leather merchant. Fell: the hide of an animal; monger: a dealer in a commodity. In his case it was mostly sheep – think sheepskin. He was quite successful. In a court case there was testimony about the quality of his pelts being better and that he sold them for less than his competitors. Robert arrived in Plymouth aboard the Fortune in 1621. He was about 42 years old and he and his wife, Margaret, had seven children at that time. He and Margaret had one more son, Ephraim, in 1625. So with a family of 10 he would be entitled to 200 acres in the Plymouth Second Division of 1627, in which every man, woman and child was to receive 20 acres. The strange thing here is that only his oldest daughter Phoebe and his son Samuel immigrated to Plymouth with their parents, but still Robert was either granted or acquired about 200 acres. Most of his children were older and stayed in England. His grants were located just west of Governor Thomas Prence’s 80-acre grant (see “title of article” in the Duxbury Clipper Dec. 9, 2009) which comprised 40 acres on either side of what is now Soule Avenue.

Robert Hicks died in Plymouth in May of 1647. He had already deeded his land in Plymouth to his son Samuel (1639). He left 40 acres of the northerly portion of his property in Duxburrough to his grandson John Bangs, the progenitor of Jeremy Bangs, the noted Pilgrim historian. The rest of his property in Duxburrough he left to his son Ephraim. Ephraim died “a violent death” within two years of his father’s passing on Dec. 12, 1649. He had only been married a little over two months to Elizabeth Howland, daughter of original Pilgrim John Howland. No record that I’ve found gives any detail of Ephraim’s “violent death.” A complete mystery. In any event, Ephraim made a will in the last day of his life leaving his property to Thomas Southworth, Governor Bradford’s stepson. That will was challenged and was set aside by the Court. The reason given by the Court was that Ephraim was “not in a capacity in regard of his said manner of death to make a legal will.” Ephraim’s mother, Margaret, became the beneficiary, but the order was not recorded and she had to go back years later (1660) to insist that it be recorded. She died circa 1665.

Robert Hicks may have thought that he had taken care of his son Samuel when he deeded his homestead in Plymouth to Samuel. That appears not to be the case, because with the deaths of his father and brother being so close together and Ephraim’s will in dispute, Samuel felt he was entitled to Ephraim’s property. In those days, though, there were occasional instances of property passing to daughters, it was customary for property to pass to male members of the family. The court appointed arbitrators to settle the dispute between Samuel and his mother (and the rest of the family). Samuel ended up with some of his father’s property in Acushnet and left Plymouth to live in Dartmouth. He did have to provide for some of his mother’s support. It was not a total victory for either party – is that a surprise? Bitterness followed.

Ephraim had managed to sell 60 acres to John Rogers in 1648, property that later became part of the Bradford Family land at Island Creek (see “John Barnes Grant” in the Duxbury Clipper July 22, 2015). Ten acres of the parcel adjacent to the Prence Grant passed into the hands of Ralph Partridge, who described the land as “at Hicks his necke which I bought of Mr. Hicks” in a deed to his daughter Elizabeth (Partridge) Kemp Thatcher who, at that time owned the West half of

the Prence Grant. Elizabeth married Dr. Samuel Seabury, so what is now Seabury Point was once Hicks Point (not to be confused with the Hicks Point we have today). Seabury Point was the location of Capt. John Alden's shipyard. That made three shipyards over a short distance along what is now Bay Road: the Soule shipyard near Landing Road beach, Alden's shipyard at Seabury Point and Isaiah Bradford's shipyard at the Island at Island Creek.

What happened to the 40-acre parcel that Robert Hicks left to his grandson John Bangs? Bangs sold the property to George Partridge in 1652. This made George a neighbor of Ralph Partridge, the first minister of The First Parish Church. Although we don't have proof of George and Ralph's relationship, we don't think they were brothers but they were at least cousins. George Partridge gave this land to his son James Partridge in 1689.

Other owners included Jonathan Brewster, Joseph Freeman and Samuel Loring who had his tack factory on this land or land that was adjacent. More recent owners include Charles H. Brown, Charles W. Harper and Loring Nudd, Sr. and Jr. To more accurately locate the property for you, the best landmark for this property is the dragon sculpture on Loring Nudd, Jr.'s lot.



This map shows the land owned by Robert Hicks in Duxbury in the 1600s.



BY LAMONT
"MONTY" HEALY